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Request for Participation #5

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Environmental Impact Statement for a Program of Vegetation Management

A ***New Program*** for managing competing and unwanted vegetation is being developed by the Pacific Northwest Region (Oregon and Washington) of the USDA Forest Servce. This **Request for Participation** is the **fifth** in a series of requests for your help in the development of the Enviromental Impact Statement (EIS) for our new program. This Request shares important information about the preferred alternatives and discusses the upcoming public comment period. Please pay special attention to the enclosed response form. By filling it out and returning it, you will receive important information about the widespread public involvement activities scheduled around the Pacific Northwest Region following release of the Draft EIS.

SHOUT
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IT

Pacific Northwest Region
Vegetation Management
Environmental Impact Statement
The Process

1. PLANNING & ORGANIZING

- Process Management Meeting 5/86
- Recommendations
- Decision
- Notice of Intent 6/86
- Scoping
- Management Objectives for Environmental Analysis 7/86

2. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

- Interdisciplinary Team Meeting #1 Scoping 8/86
- Tight Outline of E.I.S. Issues Alternatives Data Needs 9/86
- Public Participation Internal Review 10/86
- Interdisciplinary Team Meeting #2 Environmental Analysis
- Rough Draft of E.I.S. and Outline of Record of Decision 3/87
- Internal Review, Public Participation 4/87
- Interdisciplinary Team Meeting #3 Documentation 5/87
- Public Release of Draft E.I.S. 8/87

3. DECISION MAKING

- Public Comment Period Internal Review 8/87
- Analysis of Comments
- Interdisciplinary Team Meeting #4 Response to Comments 11/87
- Internal Review Final E.I.S. Record of Decision 12/87
- Decision by Responsible Official 12/87
- Public Release of Final E.I.S and Record of Decision (or New Draft E.I.S) (or Supplement) 1/88
- Start of Vegetation Management Activities Spring '88

USDA Forest Service
Pacific Northwest Region
P.O. Box 3623
Portland, OR 97208
Attn: Vegetation Management Team

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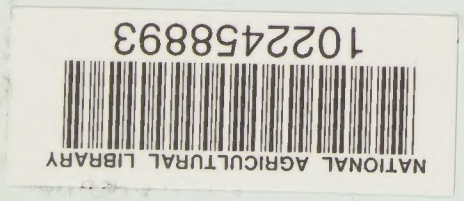

The Public Comment Period Draft Vegetation Management EIS

What Is It?

Under the guidelines of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), after preparing a draft environmental impact statement, and before preparing a final environmental impact statement, an agency has the responsibility to circulate the analysis and invite comments from other agencies and the public. The comment period is where efforts are made by agencies to contact the public and get their comments on the proposed actions and environmental analysis. Public meetings are held, open houses sponsored, notices appear in newspapers, and public service announcements are made on television and radio stations.

Why Do You Have a Public Comment Period?

Public comment periods help us make better land management decisions. They provide you an opportunity to review an agency's proposed action. Individuals, groups and other agencies can review the information and analysis in the documents and indicate to the decisionmakers their areas of concern and what action they would like to see the agency take. New information is often gained that affects the final decision. Comment periods provide the public with an opportunity to contribute their knowledge and expertise to the process. Listening to comments from a broad range of viewpoints results in better and more well-informed decisions.

How Do I Get Involved in the Vegetation Management Comment Period?

During the comment period for the vegetation management DEIS, public involvement activities will be occurring throughout the Region. They are being sponsored by the 19 National Forests in Oregon and Washington and the Regional Office.

To get involved, you need to carefully read and complete the enclosed response guide. Mail it back to us and you will be placed on the mailing lists of your choice. The individual National Forests or Regional Office will then send you information and schedules of meetings, open houses, or other activities directly pertaining to the vegetation management EIS.

Up to this point, we have been communicating with you out of the Regional office in Portland, OR. As we move into the comment period, we think that for many of you, your needs for information and questions can best be answered by the employees of the local forest with which you are most familiar. The Forest is where the actual management projects take place. Learning about their vegetation management program is important. Forest employees are the experts in understanding how the Regional EIS will affect their forest vegetation management program and they can best answer site-specific questions. In addition, this helps the forest identify people who may want to be involved in future vegetation management projects.

For others, particularly state or regional organizations and agencies, the Regional Office in Portland will be your best contact. We encourage you to contact us for questions or additional needs for information.

When Does All This Take Place?

A 90-day comment period will begin in August as soon as the Draft EIS is available to the public. The comment period will then continue throughout the fall. Dates for meetings, open houses and other activities will be set by each Forest. Again, by reading and filling out the enclosed response form, you can be placed on appropriate mailing lists. Once on a mailing list, you will be sent information about scheduled public involvment activities.

Many, many people have made valuable and thoughtful contributions to almost every aspect of the vegetation management EIS. The interdisciplinary team is moving into the final stages of compiling and printing the draft EIS. We are confident we have a much improved and more complete analysis because of your participation. We are anxious to see it published, and hope you will continue to be involved through the comment period and final decision-making.

Three Preferred Alternatives - B, D, and E

One important step completed in May was the identification of preferred alternatives. Three preferred alternatives were recommended by the interdisciplinary team and approved by Regional Forester, Jim Torrence. They are Alternatives B, D and E.

A Different Approach

Naming three preferred alternatives is not often done. Most of you are used to seeing just one preferred alternative and may wonder why in this Draft EIS we have identified three. We recognize that is a different approach and would like to share with you why it is important to the development of a new vegetation management program.

It is important to recognize that there are many different ways to manage competing and unwanted vegetation. In the environmental analysis, we analyzed seven of those ways (building the seven from public issues identified in the early scoping efforts). Of the seven, the interdisciplinary team identified three alternatives especially responsive to key issues of protection of human health, social and economic effects and effects on the environment. We think each of these alternatives provide good implementable programs for managing competing and unwanted vegetation in the Pacific Northwest Region. Now, during the comment period, we want to know what you think.

As an agency, we don't want to use the comment period as a time to tell you what's right (as one preferred alternative sometimes implies). We want to listen to what you have to say about managing competing and unwanted vegetation. Often, with one preferred alternative, what is right about it -- according to the agency, and what is wrong with it -- according to the public becomes the only focus for discussion. We want to create an open and collaborative atmosphere for the public comment period. We hope that three preferred alternatives will provide a broad base for discussion, facilitate good interaction, and emphasize that you are helping to make the best decision possible.

Overview of the Alternatives

	Purpose and Theme	Time for Action	Project Design
A	Eliminate risk from herbicides.	At first sign before damage occurs.	Prevention and correction both okay; herbicides will not be used.
B Preferred	Intensive vegetation management.	At first sign before damage occurs.	Prevention and correction both okay; all tools and techniques available.
C	No Action.	No action unless competing or unwanted vegetation threatens public safety.	Correction only; use of fire and herbicides are prohibited.
D Preferred	Prevent competing and unwanted vegetation.	At first clear sign of potentially significant damage.	Prevention is preferred; herbicides available as last option.
E Preferred	Reduce risk from herbicides to the public.	At first sign before significant damage occurs.	Prevention preferred. No aerial application; some herbicides prohibited; manual use restricted.
F	Reduce smoke.	At first sign before damage occurs.	Fire will not be used to treat slash or prepare planting sites.
G	Increase commodity production	At first sign before damage occurs.	All tools and methods freely available.

In **Alternative B**, we would intensively manage resources, meet program goals and, within this framework, minimize effects on the environment. "B" describes the vegetation management program assumed in the Forest plans now being produced. In this alternative, **all tools are available** to manage competing and unwanted vegetation.

With **Alternative D**, we would emphasize and integrate natural ecosystem processes into all management strategies and practices. Good and services for human use would be produced within this framework. **Preventing** unwanted vegetation is the preferred strategy, with an emphasis on **monitoring** and **evaluation**. All tools are available, with **herbicides used as a last resort.**

In **Alternative E** our objective would be to produce resources for human use, while **emphasizing protection of human health, both for the public and forest workers. Preventing** unwanted vegetation is the preferred strategy, except where **correction** would result in lower costs or environmental impacts. **No aerial application** of herbicides is permitted, specific herbicides are prohibited, and additional safety requirements for workers are imposed.